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Forest Management Of Small Woodlots

Richard Anderson

Over half (59%) of the 502 million acres of commercial forest land in the United States is owned by four million private, nonindustrial owners, in tracts of 5000 acres or less (Craig 1974). Because it is estimated that in thirty years the demand for wood in the U.S. will exceed the supply, it is these small forest lands that are now coming into the spotlight (USDA 1975). As the Forest Service stated in its "Outlook For Timber in the United States" (1972): "Many of these privately held woodlots include highly productive timber sites, and most are close to markets for timber products. These ownerships consequently have long been of major importance as a source of timber supplies for the wood-using industries" (Kelly 1975). Good management of these small woodlots is very important to the future supply of timber in the U.S.

However, only 10% of these four million owners currently practice any form of forest management. The majority of these small woodlots are inferior in timber quality and stand vitality. It is estimated that 25 million acres of these ownerships are unstocked, 50 million acres are poorly stocked, and an additional 120 million acres need some sort of stand improvement (Butler 1974). So as the nation turns to

these private woodlots with an increasing demand for timber production, recreational space, wildlife habitat, and watershed, they are not ready.

The substandard management of these woodlots stems from four main sources. The first is a lack of information on the possibilities and benefits of planned management, either from simple ignorance or owner apathy. The second is the communications barrier between the owner and the professional forester (the bad guy logger image). Third is a lack of interest on the part of the owner to improve or manage his woodlot. And fourth is the economic obstacles faced by a small, private operation (Butler 1974). These four problems can be broken down into several more specific problems of small woodlots.

Landowner attitudes: Many woodlot owners have no clearly defined goals for their tracts, and many of the others don't realize that forest management is a multiple use tool.

Lack of application of technical knowledge: Less than 3% of these four million owners are receiving any kind of technical assistance.

Risk: The threat of either natural (fire, insect damage, etc.) or unnatural (trespass, arson) disaster creates risk in any management plan.

Insurance: Insurance against loss of timber or other related aspects of a management plan is not available; not even from the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation.

Small scale diseconomies: Over 70% of the forestry cooperatives established in the last fifty years have folded because of lack of interest, capital, volume of business, or management.

Labor and equipment: Even 5000 acres of timber cannot support the \$100,000 in hand and power tools, tractors, trucks, discs, planters, and other equipment needed for an intensive management plan. Some services such as fire line plowing, site preparation, and planting are available at cost from some private contractors, as is advice from consulting foresters, forest industry, and associations of landowners. But many areas don't have any such assistance for the



An unutilized, unmanaged woodland lot on a farm just north of Ames, Iowa.

The Author—Richard Anderson, a freshman forestry student at ISU, originally submitted this article to Dr. Hall in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Forestry 101, Introduction To Forestry and Outdoor Recreation Resources.

small woodlot owner because of the seasonal nature of the work, the investment required, the uneconomical size of these tracts, the distance between tracts, and the competition with larger operations (forest industry) for labor.

Lack of investment capital: As stated earlier, 195 million acres of these privately owned woodlots need some sort of stand improvement (Pomeroy 1973).

Recently, a group called Trees For People was formed from representatives of the American Forestry Association, the Association of Conservation Districts, and other natural resource related fields. The purpose of TFP is "to improve the management, protection, and use of small, private, nonindustrial forests. Furthermore it is improvement for whatever purpose the owners may have in mind, be it preservation as a wildlife sanctuary, or production of timber" (Pomeroy 1973).

TFP found that the small, private woodlot owners' most pressing problems were: protection from fire, control of insect damage and disease, lack of technical assistance to forest owners, and lack of cost sharing opportunities (Pomeroy 1973). TFP recommended the following:

1. Coordinate information on all public forestry programs at the county level so the owner need make only one contact. This should include referrals to consulting foresters, contractors, loggers, and woodbuyers.

2. Provide for owners what they can't supply themselves. (i.e. fire protection; insect or disease protection; technical information; research on management, silviculture, and utilization; increased development of markets; and maintenance of a favorable public climate for forestry.)

3. Share the capital investment of long term activities that are in the public interest, such as planting trees, development of multiple-use areas, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation potential, and preservation of aesthetic values.

4. Intensify educational programs by public agencies, forest industry, and conservation associations.

5. Maintain and improve tax laws that recognize the long-term potential of forests and their contribution to the environment.

6. Encourage cooperation between small forest owners for the economical and professional management of their property.

7. Develop reliable sources of labor and equipment.

8. Ensure the availability of long term, low interest loans for management programs.

9. Encourage multiple-use of forest lands.

10. Classify land for intensive management so that those areas with the greatest potential could be developed first.

11. Authorize adequate emergency funds for prompt control of potentially disastrous outbreaks of fire, etc.

12. Set up an economically sound leasing



Just one example of the some 300 million acres of woodlots owned by private, nonindustrial concerns.

program that will ensure intensive management of forests plus income for small woodlot owners (Butler 1974).

The Federal government has also recognized the potential of these small, private woodlots with new funding for fire protection and reforestation, the establishment of the Cooperative Forest Management Program, and increased research into control of insects and diseases (Butler 1974). Other suggestions for up to 80% federal cost sharing on stand improvement, establishment of a national tree bank program, and annual federal appropriations to subsidize interest payments on loans for forest improvement, have been made, but have not been approved by Congress. However, in 1973 Congress did approve the Forestry Incentives Program (FIP), which provides federal cost-sharing of tree planting and timber stand improvement with private landowners of tracts less than 500 acres. The federal share ranges from 50% to 75%, \$10,000 maximum, depending on the rate set by each state and its counties' Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee (USDA 1975).

The ultimate use of these woodlots does, however, rest in the hands of the owner. He must recognize that by his ownership he is a land use planner. And he must view and accept forest management as a multiple-use tool, and set goals for the management of his land.

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